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THE MONTHLY GULL BULLETIN

AUDUBON ASSOCIATION OF THE PACIFIC

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A Lagoon in September

Pleasure awaits every student of bird life should he or she visit the various lagoons along the Pacific shores during the months of August, September and October. The movement of shore and marsh birds is at its peak during these months when one seldom fails to see many interesting species. Their feeding habits may be closely watched through binoculars and in many cases without the glasses. The fear of man is gradually being eliminated from the instinct of the law-protected birds and approach may be made at times that is surprising. Let us hope that this instinctive fear will gradually disappear until we shall be able to study birds under such favorable conditions as were found by Beebe and others on the Galapagos.

The student should seize every opportunity available to visit the lagoon at Moss Landing near Castroville. During the present time the highway is under construction but an excellent road leads from the old Watsonville-Castroville highway direct to the Landing. The highway runs along this lagoon for a long distance and crosses two large sloughs that lead back towards the hills to the eastward. The ocean side of the lagoon may be reached over the bridge leading to the whaling station, now abandoned.

Such a visit was made by the writer during the week-end of September 22, 1930, a short period in two afternoons being used for observations.

The tide was coming in and the mud flats were being gradually covered by water but there was plenty of feeding space exposed for the numerous shore birds at the time of our visit. There were myriads of small fish in the lagoon which could be seen jumping out of the water wherever one looked. These fish appeared to be from one to three inches in length and were evidently much disturbed by larger fish feeding on them. These minnows are a source of food for the Brown Pelican, Cormorants, Grebes and Great Blue Herons, all of which species were well represented. And, of course, the Gulls were everywhere.

Our first find was a solitary Long-billed Curlew feeding industriously along the flats and busily probing with its long bill as it slowly worked along the mud. At times it would turn the head and probe the mud sideways, first on one side and then on the other.

The noisy Willets were much in evidence, mingling with the Dowitchers and Godwits. Scattered here and there were Greater Yellow-legs and on two occasions Lesser Yellow-legs. Small flocks of Black-bellied Plovers were scattered along the flats, some with the black markings still on the belly. Hudsonian Curlews were numerous but shy on approach.

The smaller birds were represented by the Western and Least Sandpipers, Sanderlings and Snowy Plovers, all busy feeding at top speed as if to make the best of the remaining time before the flats should be covered by the incoming tide.

Strange as it may seem, there was a lack of Killdeer. Of course, there were a few but these were unusually quiet.

The next find was one to be remembered for all time. A large collection of sea growth which looked like green moss similar to that between stepping stones in front of modern residences, had been cast up on the shore of the lagoon. Busily probing this mass was a flock of shore birds comprising Dowitchers, Western and Least Sandpipers, a single Snowy Plover and one strange bird about the size of a Dowitcher. Close study revealed that this stranger was a Knot in winter plumage; it was just as busy as the rest of the probers; and we were able to approach within twenty-five feet without causing more than a hasty glance or two from any of them. Soon four other shore birds appeared over the lagoon and the Knot flew out evidently for the purpose of guiding them back to this feeding spot as they then swerved from their course and returned with him to his repast. These four were also Knots.

While we were watching this group with delighted interest a Greater Yellow-leg alighted on the shore nearby and proceeded to fish. He would run quickly along in the shallow water with his head close to the surface jabbing on either side and turning quickly this way or that to follow the school of small minnows. His object seemed to be to get them confused and jumping from the water, and to force them towards the shore. Occasionally he would catch a fish about an inch or an inch and a half long. It would be held across the bill and finally worked into position to be swallowed. It was no sooner swallowed than the hunt was resumed. He seemed to be successful about once in four times. The movements were very quick especially when he was running through the water in pursuit of his victims. This Yellow-leg worked back and forth over a stretch of shore line about one hundred feet long.

As the sun was disappearing in the west we walked out to the ocean beach and along it. A Brown Pelican was fishing in the water close to the shore where there seemed to be a deep trough between the breakers and the beach. A Snowy Plover hurried past with lowered head as if to help him forward in his twinkling stride. A large flock of Sanderlings were running out after the receding waves; meanwhile feeding hurriedly and then retreating just ahead of the incoming waves.

Cast up in the higher drift lines were numerous dead birds: principally Gulls, Cormorants, Auklets and Sooty Shearwaters.

Night was fast approaching as we neared our automobile. We were loath to leave this interesting locality with all its attractions. But, other living things did not share our feeling, as an enormous flock of Ducks, probably Sprig, was leaving the sloughs close by. They headed southerly along the ocean shore line and were probably starting on another long lap of their journey from the North to the Imperial Valley or other feeding grounds. No count was possible but there must have been well over a thousand. Other small flocks also were seen headed in the same direction.

Try this district, fellow students, and be well repaid for the time expended. L. Ph. Bolander, Oakland, California. October 18, 1930.

Spotted Owl: On August 12, 1930, I camped with a companion near Iowa Hill, Placer County, thirteen miles east of Colfax, while en route to the northern-most group of giant Sequoias. While preparing supper about 7:30 p. m. we were startled by a hair-raising yelping which came from a nearby cluster of incense cedars.

By the aid of a flashlight the rounded head and light underparts of an Owl were clearly discerned on a limb about twenty feet from the ground. After a few minutes it disappeared through the trees. About three in the morning the almost terrifying call was repeated several times near our camp, but we did not again see the nocturnal visitor. After carefully checking descriptions in several books, we were glad to add the Spotted Owl to our life lists. Brighton C. Cain, Oakland, California. August 27, 1930.

The October Field Trip was taken on Sunday, the twelfth, to Lake Merced. On account of rain only five members and two guests attended. As this trip is usually very popular it was repeated on the 19th, with fourteen members and twelve guests. On the 19th, the day was overcast with slight breezes and turned quite cold in the late afternoon.

The party formed at the head of the canyon at Junipero Serra Boulevard and Randolph Street dividing into two groups with Messrs F. M. Jencks and Arthur Myer as leaders going down the ravine on either side.

The first bird observed was a Cooper Hawk which was flushed from a willow grove at the bottom of the ravine. Audubon Warblers and Juncos were quite numerous.

Luncheon was eaten at the Lake. It was hoped that we would find the Florida Gallinule here which had been reported the previous Sunday but much to our disappointment it did not show itself. A few of the party were fortunate in seeing a Sora Rail here.

As we proceeded around the Lake we observed quite a flock of Ruddy Ducks including one Albino Ruddy. At the head of the Lake several members walked back a few hundred yards on the east side to examine more closely two Loons which had been seen from the west side. These proved to be Red-throated.

Crossing the highway to the other Lake a flock of eleven American Golden-eyes and a flock of forty-three Canvas-back Ducks were observed.

A total of fifty-eight birds were observed on both trips as follows:

*Red-throated Loon
Eared Grebe
Western Grebe
Pied-billed Grebe
Farallon Cormorant
Great Blue Heron
*Black-cr. Night Heron
American Bittern
*Green-winged Teal
Canvas-back Duck
*American Golden-eye
Ruddy Duck
*Sharp-shinned Hawk
*Cooper Hawk
*Red-tailed Hawk
Sparrow Hawk
California Quail
Sora Rail
†Florida Gallinule
Coot
Killdeer
†Greater Yellow-leg
Western Gull
California Gull
*Bonaparte Gull
Burrowing Owl
Anna Hummingbird
Belted Kingfisher
Red-shafted Flicker
†Downy Woodpecker
Black Phoebe
†Horned Lark
Chestnut-back Chickadee
Bush-tit
Wren-tit
Bewick Wren
Marsh Wren
†Robin
Song Sparrow
Hermit Thrush
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
*Myrtle Warbler
Audubon Warbler
†Townsend Warbler
Yellow-throat
†Meadowlark
Red-winged Blackbird
†Brewer Blackbird
†House Sparrow
Linnet
†Purple Finch
†Pine Siskin
*Willow Goldfinch
Green-backed Goldfinch
Spotted Towhee
Fox Sparrow
Junco
Nuttall Sparrow

† Observed on the 12th only.
* Observed on the 19th only.

Laura A. Stephens, historian.

A portion of a letter received from Mr. John Kunder, resident keeper on the Farallon Islands.

"Your report in The Gull and observations of the bird life of the Farallon Islands meets with my views in every way. The Murre in my opinion is doomed or faces extinction due to the crude oil scum and the cannibal Mr. Gull. Of late years the Gull has been the prime factor in the destruction of the Murre.

I also wish to state that a large number of migrating birds visited us this season. Large flocks appeared every morning about 3 a. m. and departed late in the evenings. This lasted about three weeks including the last two weeks in September and the first week in October. The weather was fine. These visits have not been noted for six years."

Audubon Notes

November Meeting will be held on Thursday, the 13th, at 8 p. m., room 19, 2nd floor, Ferry Building.

The speaker of the evening will be Professor George Haley of St. Ignatius College, subject: "Bird Life in Alaska."

November Field Trip will be taken Sunday, the 16th, to Alpine Lake over an easy route away from automobile roads. Distance eight miles. In case of heavy rain trip will be taken the Sunday following. Purchase round trip tickets to Ross 60c. Take Sausalito Ferry leaving foot of Market Street at 8:45 a. m. Bring luncheon and filled canteens. Miss Ames and Chas. A. Bryant leaders.

Christmas Census will be taken on Sunday, December 21st, the Sunday following the regular trip. All those wishing to help in this work, please send name to Charles A. Bryant, 150 Franklin Street, San Francisco.

Memberships for 1931 ($3.00 per year) received at this time entitle the new members to all the privileges of the Association for the remainder of 1930 free.

If you know of some one interested in birds do them a favor as well as the Audubon by passing this information on to them.

Master Ananda Jacobs died October 19, 1930.

October Meeting: The 165th regular meeting was held October 9th, in room 19, Ferry Building with twenty-five present. President Cain presiding.

Mr. Bryant as a member of the Research Committee reported data compiled on the White Pelican and American Egret.

Miss Pringle of the Research Committee reported on the Hummingbirds and asked for co-operation in noting the color of flowers visited by these birds.

Miss Mary K. Kriebel of Santa Barbara, California, was elected to membership.

Field observations were reported as follows:

Clarence Smith: September 21st, Tennessee Cove, Long-eared Owl.

Charles Bryant: September 28th, Phoenix Lake, 4 male and 1 female Wood Ducks.

F. M. Jencks: October 14th, at his home near Mosswood Park, Mocking Bird.

Herman De Fremery: September 21st, head of Tomales Bay, two Black Rails.

Mrs. Otis Smith: October 9th, Phoenix Lake, two Ring-necked Ducks.

Cranson Hopkins: October 1st, on island in Lake Merritt, American Egret.

The speaker of the evening, Dr. J. M. Linsdale, of the University of California, spoke on Problems of Bird Conservation. The preservation of the Rails was said to depend on the securing of salt marsh refuges. The Sage Hen, virtually extinct in California, must be preserved in Nevada, if saved at all. The White Pelican's fate rests with both California and Nevada. In Neveda steps must be taken to employ a game warden to protect the breeding grounds at Pyramid Lake. In California two things must be done. An abandoned water tunnel at Eagle Lake must be closed in order to keep the water high enough to preserve the island on which the Pelicans breed. The law must be changed to protect the Pelican, now unprotected because of the mistaken idea that it catches trout, a fish which, in fact, is much too agile to be caught by a Pelican.

Audubon Association of the Pacific

For the Study and Protection of Birds

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Monthly meeting second Thursday, 8 P. M., Room 19, Ferry Building.
Address Bulletin correspondence to Mrs. A. B. Stephens, 1695 Filbert St., San Francisco.
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